

Current Support Brief

POOR AGRICULTURAL SITUATION IN NORTH VIETNAM IN 1963



CIA/RR CB 64-1

January 1964

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Office of Research and Reports

CONFIDENTIAL

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C-O-N-F-I-D-E-N-T-I-A-L

POOR AGRICULTURAL SITUATION
IN NORTH VIETNAM IN 1963

The tight food situation that has persisted in North Vietnam during the past few years has been aggravated by another poor agricultural year in 1963. A series of mediocre harvests since 1960 has drained food reserves, and supplies for the next 6 months are expected to be below those of the same period of last year.

Total production of food crops* in 1963 is well below the planned level and is estimated to be about 5 percent below the mediocre harvest of 5.7 million tons in 1962.** Production of rice, which normally accounts for 80 to 85 percent of the total food crop, probably declined proportionately.

Adverse weather conditions, principally drought; low and declining availability of fertilizers; and the lack of agricultural chemicals with which to control insect damage and plant diseases have contributed significantly to the lack of agricultural progress. The preference of peasants for cultivation of their private plots as opposed to work on the cooperatives, deficient technology (and consequently very low labor productivity), and ineffective governmental control in the countryside have further burdened the prospect of effective agricultural operations.

Although major food items are rationed and availability of meat has declined since 1960, there have been no reports of critical food shortages. Black market activities in food, however, have increased. Early corrective measures fostered by the government, even if successful, probably will not prevent a very tight food situation for the next 6 months -- at least until the first harvest of 1964.

* Including -- in addition to rice -- sweet potatoes, cassava, corn, and beans on a rice equivalent basis.

** Tonnages are given in metric tons throughout this publication.

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1. Early Crops

Production of early rice, which accounts for about one-third of the total rice harvest in North Vietnam, is estimated to have been about 1.5 million tons. The early rice crop was subjected to severe drought conditions in the spring of 1963. The regime organized a large-scale antidrought campaign in order to lessen the adverse effect of drought. As a result of this campaign, the planned acreage of early rice was approached with 894,000 hectares planted, and the effect of the drought on yields was mitigated somewhat. However, spring-harvested subsidiary food crops, which account for about 80 percent of the total subsidiary food crop output, generally were neglected. The acreage of the latter that was planted reportedly was about 15 percent smaller than was planned, and yields were reported to be low.

2. Late Crops

The late rice crop, which accounts for about two-thirds of the total rice harvest, is estimated tentatively at 2.9 million tons -- about 10 percent less than the 3.2 million tons estimated for 1962. An increase in the acreage of late food crops would have helped to offset the adverse effect of the winter and spring drought of 1962/63 on the early harvest. Late planting, typhoon damage, and a shortage of rice seedlings, however, resulted in a reduction of acreage to a reported 1.3 million hectares, an area slightly less than that planted in 1962 and reportedly the lowest in the past 6 years. Prospects for the late harvest, which generally is harvested in October and November, have been reduced further by rainy weather during the harvest period. It has been reported that only 37 percent of the late rice crop had been harvested by 25 November. The office of the premier issued a special instruction to speed up the harvesting.

3. Agro-Technical Problems

Production of fertilizer is a continuing problem in North Vietnam. Because chemical fertilizer generally is in short supply, the regime has concentrated on the intensive use of organic fertilizers, primarily of animal origin. Reports indicate, however, that fertilizer goals have not been met in 1963, and the shortfall in fertilizer has been blamed for contributing to the decrease in crop yields in 1963. Because the rate of application of fertilizer has been declining since 1958, the

government has attempted to promote programs designed to increase numbers of livestock. This program has been hampered, however, by shortages of feed and extensive slaughtering of animals because of food shortages in the countryside.

The lack of pesticides and fungicides has contributed to insect damage and plant diseases, both of which are responsible for sizable reductions in crop yields. In September 1963 an official publication reported that 15 to 20 percent of all agricultural crops, including 600,000 to 700,000 tons of rice, was lost annually by insect damage and plant diseases.

4. Peasant Attitudes

The peasants of North Vietnam are reluctant workers for the cooperatives, and this trait, combined with an extremely low level of technology, has resulted in very low labor productivity. Frequent references in the press to problems of cooperative management suggest that the regime is having considerable difficulty in overcoming peasant indifference. Peasant defections from the countryside to the cities during the period of the spring drought have been reported. The regime also has admitted that the peasants continue to concentrate their energy on private plots to the detriment of the cooperative sector. As a result, the labor supply is often insufficient during the critical agricultural seasons, and much field work is left undone or is carried out in a shoddy manner.

5. Food Situation

The relatively poor harvest of 1963 reportedly has made an already tight food situation in North Vietnam even worse. Recent official statements have referred to low reserves and the possibility of insufficient food supplies in the event of a continuation of natural calamities. In an attempt to alleviate this situation, the government has initiated campaigns to increase the plantings of subsidiary foods and vegetables in all available locations and to develop private raising of livestock. Factories, schools, collective eating houses, and army units have been encouraged to participate in this program. In an attempt to increase agricultural procurements from the peasants, the government made substantial increases in procurement prices in the fall of 1963. In some cases these increases ranged from 25 to 50 percent.

Although there have been indications of serious food shortages in many areas of the country, there have been no reports of malnutrition. Major food items such as rice, cassava, sweet potatoes, fish, and meat are rationed in urban areas. Meat is reported to be in very short supply, and there has been a continuous decline in availability of meat since 1960.

Although the government has attempted to maintain strict control over the distribution of food, black market activities have been on the rise. Widespread falsification of employment records has permitted a flow of food to the black market.

6. Outlook for 1964

The North Vietnamese Council of Ministers announced on 27 November 1963 that it will begin an emulation drive to increase agricultural output for the approaching winter-spring cultivation season. Each agricultural cooperative is to set a goal to increase production of agricultural products 10 percent above the highest level achieved in the past 3 years. These and other measures taken by the regime imply that food supplies are expected to remain tight for the next 6 months until the first harvest of 1964.

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